

October 18 Matthew 22:15-22

While it is true that we are currently living in this world, we are not of this world.

Physically we are here, but spiritually we belong somewhere else.

I am but a stranger here,

Heaven is my home;

Earth is a desert drear;

Heaven is my home:

Danger and sorrow stand

Round me on every hand;

Heaven is my fatherland,

Heaven is my home.

We are sojourners. Strangers passing through a strange land. This is why we find so many things around us so hard to put up with. This is why some people who know us, find US hard to put up with. Our values are not the values of the world around us. Our priorities are not the priorities of many of the people who surround us. We are on a pilgrimage. We are on an eternal journey. We are strangers living in a strange world. Heaven is our home.

We are children of the Light. There is nothing special about us. We are in 'the Light' because the Holy Spirit has brought us to a saving faith in Jesus Christ who Himself is the light. We have left the darkness behind. We have embraced Jesus who is the one true. The light that can never be diminished. The light that can never go out.

Today's Gospel lesson is about the Pharisees plotting to entrap Jesus. There was nothing new in this. There has been an ongoing battle between the religious leaders of Israel and Jesus. They questioned His authority. The Pharisees were worried about the number of people who were following Jesus. So, they wanted to discredit Him before the people. That way they could maintain their own status and power.

There is something strange about this particular text. The Pharisees, who were supposed to be deeply pious and religious purists, were willing to team up with the Herodians. The Herodians were sell outs. They were partisans. They were supporters of the ruling Romans. They were a group of Jews who had compromised their faith and piety, in order to win favors from the governing authorities. They despised each other, but there is an unwritten law **'my enemy's enemy is my friend.'** The enemies of Jesus were willing to work together to put Jesus down.

They asked the question. **"Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"**

This was their way of trying to get Jesus to say something that would incriminate himself. If He answered "No," the Herodians, who enjoyed the benefits of Roman rule, would report him to the authorities as a traitor or seditionist.

If He answered "Yes," the Pharisees would be able to discredit him among the people as a Roman sympathizer. They could show that He was unfaithful to the faith of Israel. Jesus knows everything. He saw into their hearts. This is why He referred to them as hypocrites. He knew the devious intent behind their teaming up to confront him.

But Jesus didn't succumb to their ploy. Instead, He asked to see the coin everyone had to use to pay their taxes. It bore the image of the Roman emperor. Jesus asked, **"Whose image is on the coin?"** Both groups answered, **"The emperor."** Jesus then replied, **"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's."**

Matthew tells us that when they heard this, they were amazed. They left Jesus and went away defeated. His answer enabled him to escape the trap that the two extreme but opposing groups were trying to set for him.

It acknowledged to the Herodians that we do have obligations to uphold to our worldly governments. It expressed to the Pharisees that we also have obligations to uphold as citizens of God's kingdom.

But more deeply than this, Jesus gave a teaching that left them with a challenge that rings down through our relationships with everyone we come across in the course of our everyday lives.

Jesus is saying that Christians are citizens of two kingdoms. We have a responsibility to uphold as citizens of the world, and to the governing authorities of our Nation, our state, our County and our local community. Jesus is saying that we have an obligation to pay taxes to the government, to pay for schools, the police, and fire service. All the various services and benefits that result from living under our nation's ruling authority. That is **"giving to Caesar what is Caesar's"**. We are to keep the law unless in some way it goes against the Bible and the teachings of God.

Additionally, however, we recognize that earthly governments ask their citizens for more than money. Governments also ask for our allegiance. They seek our loyalty.

Governments have the right to establish laws and have the authority to enforce them.

This is why we have police, courts and prisons.

The apostle Paul asserted repeatedly in his writings to the early Christian churches, that believers were to respect governmental authority. Luther certainly believed and taught that Jesus upheld the authority of earthly government. He talked in terms of two kingdoms. God's kingdom he said was the kingdom of the Right hand. Earthly kingdoms he said formed the kingdom of the Left hand. He taught that their laws should be kept providing, of course, that they did not conflict with God's Laws.

The apostle Paul asserted repeatedly in his writings to the early Christian churches, that believers were to respect governmental authority.

But Jesus' response did not end with **"Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's."** If He had we would have been left with a mandate to live our lives in total obedience to the authority of our earthly rulers. But Jesus didn't end there! He also added, **"give to God the things that are God's."** By this Jesus meant that God also deserves our allegiance. He also deserves our loyalty and our obedience because we are spiritually citizens of His kingdom.

Clearly God deserves our tithes and offerings. He deserves our worship & thanksgiving, for His gift of redeeming grace. Because of the forgiveness He offers, and the assurance of eternal life.

The Roman coin that Jesus held bore the image of the emperor. But what bears the image and name of God? The answer is 'us', we do! In the very first chapter of Genesis, we are told that God said, **"Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."** It goes on, **"So God created us in His image..."** We are the coins of God's

realm, of his kingdom. If we are to “give to God the things that are God’s,” then we must conclude from our Lord’s teaching that there is no limit to what we owe God. We owe God our whole being, our very life, all that is ours. No part of our life is excluded from our fundamental covenant with the one who is our Creator. The one who has redeemed us from sin and death to make us citizens of his kingdom.

Every day, we live as citizens of two kingdoms, an earthly kingdom, to which we owe certain allegiances, and a heavenly kingdom to which we owe everything. Jesus invites us to acknowledge that our government has a right to expect a certain allegiance from us. But the allegiance we owe our earthly kingdoms is limited. One day it will end, either when we die or when Jesus returns. What we owe to God is not limited to taxes and will never end. Nor should it.

We have a God who hears us. We have the power of His love behind us. We have the Holy Spirit within us. We have all of heaven ahead of us. All because Jesus lives within us. If you have Jesus, you have grace for every sin. You have direction for every turn. You have a light to drive out every darkness. You have an anchor in every storm. You have everything you need. And nothing can take it from you?

Jesus saw what was coming by way of the cross. Jesus saw the beating He would endure. He saw the blood that would run down His arm. He saw the blood that would drip off his elbows as the nails were driven into His hands. He saw that same blood as a crown of thorns was placed on His head. That same blood that ran down His forehead and into His eyes and blurred His vision.

That blood might have blurred His human vision, but Jesus was God in the flesh. He saw that blood as salvation for all who would come to Him. He saw you and me as we came to that cross and that blood washed away our sins and give us life eternal.

The night before He could see the defeat of death and the fall of Satan. The night before: He could see the plans of a Heavenly home for you and for me.

Having and living by faith in Jesus Christ means we are not just members of a religious club or society. We are citizens of two kingdoms, which are sometimes in conflict. Where the demands and expectations of the two do come into conflict, God expects that our greatest allegiance is to Him.

Jesus gave to the emperor what belonged to him, and never challenged the right of Rome to charge taxes and maintain law and order, but Jesus always gave to God what belonged to Him. Jesus acknowledged the right of Pilate to take his life, even though he could have avoided death, but He gave His life, His all, back to his heavenly Father on our behalf, for our redemption, because this was God's will.

As Christian for we are always being pulled in two directions. The one is the present world, which is not always right, but not always bad. The other one is God, who is always holy and always right.

We must never compromise our place in heaven by putting the world before God. But as the saying goes, "we should not be so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. It is only natural that we should feel uncomfortable with much of what we read in our newspapers, what we see on TV, and what we hear with our ears. It is good that we feel uncomfortable, because that means the Holy Spirit is working in us. If we ever feel totally comfortable and at ease in this sinful world, then there is something wrong.

As Jesus put it when talking about whose face was on the coin, there are two kingdoms, the values of which are in complete opposition in many ways. But the most important thing is that we belong primarily to the Kingdom of God.

Therefore I murmur not.

Heaven is my home.

Whate'er my earthly lot,

Heaven is my home.

And I shall surely stand

there at my Lord's right hand

Heaven is my fatherland,

Heav'n is my fatherland

Heaven is my home.